Opening Statement

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Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
U.S. House Committee on Science

Hearing: "*The National Academy of Sciences' Decadal Plan for Aeronautics: A Blueprint for NASA?*

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Good afternoon. I'd like to join the Chairman in welcoming our witnesses to today's hearing. We have a distinguished group of experts appearing before us, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

It is no secret that I care deeply about the future of aeronautics in America. Our aeronautics research capability and accomplishments have long been the envy of the world.

While there is legitimate concern in some quarters about the competitive threat posed by the European Union's plans for a significant and sustained thrust in aeronautics research, I have a somewhat different perspective.

Without minimizing the importance of ensuring that America's aviation industry remains a world leader, I would submit that we should be investing in aeronautics R&D *whether or not* there was an imminent competitiveness challenge from Europe or elsewhere.

It's clear that progress in aeronautics is important for reasons beyond simply helping our international trade balance. Aeronautics R&D can enable advances in the capability of America's air transportation system to handle the enormous increases in air travel projected over the next twenty years.

Aeronautics R&D can also enable more environmentally compatible aircraft, with significantly lower noise, emissions, and energy consumption relative to aircraft in commercial service today. Such new aircraft would not only improve our quality of life but would also open new markets. Finally, aeronautics R&D can lead to new concepts for protecting our nation.

However, all of these good things will only be possible if we are committed to making the investments in R&D that are necessary for achieving our research goals. The unfortunate reality is that America is *not* investing enough in such R&D.

Indeed, the Administration's budget plan for NASA's aeronautics program would have aeronautics funding decline by 32 percent between FY 2004 and FY 2007 - with no improvement in that situation envisioned over the next five years. Similarly, NASA's funding commitment to research on the next generation air transportation system would be cut in half over the next five years.

As one of our witnesses, Dr. Kaminski, warned in the preface to the National Academies' Decadal Survey of Aeronautics: *"This budgetary trend will make it increasingly difficult for NASA to build a solid foundation for the future."* Or to use a word uttered by a previous witness before this Committee, it puts NASA's aeronautics program on a path to being *"irrelevant"* if not corrected.

That would be unfortunate, because the Decadal Survey makes it clear that there are a host of research challenges to be overcome if we are to achieve the objectives I mentioned earlier.

Indeed, I want to compliment Dr. Kaminski and the Academies' Aeronautics and Space Engineering Board for producing a thoughtful and comprehensive decadal strategy for Federal - and in particular NASA - research in civil aeronautics over the next decade. I am particularly impressed with the wide range of experts you involved - an inclusiveness that gives the results of your effort a great deal of credibility in my eyes.

I would hope that our friends at NASA will give serious consideration to your recommendations and will continue to seek the Academies' independent advice on these issues - as we in Congress intend to do.

I also hope and expect that NASA will move to engage industry and our universities in a meaningful and sustained fashion - we need such collaboration if we are going to achieve our goals in aeronautics.

However, unless we also reverse the budgetary decline that NASA's aeronautics program is undergoing, we are not going to have the robust and vital R&D program that we need - and that your report envisions.

Basically, the declining budgets for NASA's aeronautics program mean that there is little money available for a robust R&D program that involves government, industry, and academia in both basic research and more advanced technology development and demonstration.

If a NASA witness were here today, I suspect that that witness would argue that NASA needs to "get back to basics" and focus on fundamental research in aeronautics - that such research has been neglected at NASA.

I suspect that all of our witnesses would agree with the NASA witness that basic research is an *essential* underpinning for NASA's efforts in aeronautics - there *has* to be a vigorous program of basic aeronautical research at NASA.

However, the clear message I take away from the two Academy reports, as well as from the testimony of the Aerospace Industries Association, is that while such basic research is *necessary*, it is clearly not *sufficient* if we want to make real progress in meeting national needs with our aeronautics program.

Yet I see little in NASA's plans that would lead me to believe that NASA is prepared to fund any significant amount of research involving more advanced technological development and demonstration efforts. Indeed, the opposite appears to be case - we hear that NASA would like to get rid of its flight research aircraft and is considering eliminating a number of its aeronautics simulators.

I hope I am wrong, because such a direction would run counter to the aeronautics R&D policy spelled out in the NASA Authorization Act of 2005.

To quote Sec. 411 of that Act: *"Congress reaffirms the national commitment to aeronautics research made in the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958. Aeronautics research and development remains a core mission of NASA. Further, the government of the United States shall promote aeronautics research and development that will expand the capacity, ensure the safety, and increase the efficiency of the Nation's air transportation system, promote the security of the Nation, protect the environment, and retain the leadership of the United States in global aviation."*

I would hope that the individuals in the Executive Branch tasked with developing a White House aeronautics policy statement will take those words to heart. We need to ensure that any national policy on aeronautics R&D that emerges properly recognizes the importance of investing in R&D that not only advances our fundamental knowledge, but also is relevant to the needs of our society.

And it should be self-evident that an aeronautics R&D policy statement promulgated by the Administration that is not followed by a commitment of resources commensurate with the national needs in aeronautics will be a hollow policy indeed.

Mr. Chairman, we have a great deal to discuss today. I again want to welcome our witnesses, and I look forward to their testimony.